

PRAYER

devout as any verbal prayer, but because our desires are often lukewarm, it certainly helps to have some words to hold onto.

Hear Augustine again on set prayer: “At certain stated hours and seasons we also use words in prayer to God, that by these signs of things we may admonish ourselves, and may acquaint ourselves with the measure of progress which we have made in this desire, and may more warmly excite ourselves to obtain an increase of its strength” (*Letter* 130). Thus the Church holds out to us the Daily Office, Litanies, Novenas, psalms while we’re driving, psalms while we’re cleaning, psalms while we’re eating, psalms while we’re sleeping — and many other forms of prayer. “Evening and morning and at noon, I utter my complaint . . . and he will hear my voice” (Ps. 55:16). “At midnight I will rise to give you thanks” (Ps. 119:62).

Of course, Jesus doesn’t just pray for us; he doesn’t just pray in us; he isn’t just prayed to by us. He also teaches us exactly what we ought to pray. “Lord, teach us to pray,” his disciples say, and Jesus’ response could not have been more straightforward: “Pray like this.” He gave us the Our Father. In this prayer, we ask for our daily bread, for deliverance from evil, for God’s will to be done here below; we confess the trespasses for which we lean on God’s forgiveness; we thank the Lord that his merciful purpose ever rules the heavens; and we adore his all-hallowed name. But above all, we address God as our Father, who knit us together in our mother’s womb and is more intimate to each of us than our innermost

selves. With these tender words of confidence and freedom, we become what Jesus came to make us. As St. John writes: “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God” (John 1:12).

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven,
 Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come.
 Thy will be done in earth,
 As it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our trespasses,
 As we forgive them that trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 But deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom,
 The power, and the glory,
 For ever and ever.

Amen.



We are a Christian ministry based primarily in the Episcopal Church, a member of the Anglican Communion. Since 1878 we have published educational resources of various kinds and *The Living Church* magazine.

**The Life of the
 Children of God**

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

Some of the most tender and intense scenes in the Gospels are those times when Jesus prays. He prayed early in the morning in solitary places (Mark 1:35), and before revelatory moments in his ministry — like at his baptism, on the mount of Transfiguration, and in Gethsemane before his Passion (Luke 3:21, 9:29, 22:41). He prayed all night before he chose the apostles (6:12), and rejoiced “in the Holy Spirit” when he thanked the Father for revealing his mysteries not to the wise but to babes (10:21-22). He prayed for Lazarus to come forth from the grave (John 11:41-42), and for the disciples “that they may be one” (John 17:11). He prayed for himself, that his cup of suffering would pass, but he prayed even more that God’s will would be done (Matt. 26:39).

The message is clear: if we want to know what prayer is, we look to Jesus. “Jesus prays for us as our priest, in us as our head, and is prayed to by us as our God” (Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms* 85). Indeed, the apostles teach us that salvation consists in nothing less than being swept up into the eternal prayer that the Son offers to his Father in the ecstasy of the Holy Spirit. To be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4) is to have the Spirit of God within us crying out “Abba, Father,” as Jesus did — “bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:15-16), that we are no longer slaves, but sons (Gal. 4:7).

Prayer emerges organically from our place within the sacramental life of the Church, the body of Christ. The Head of the body prays for us and in us, his members.

The Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son, the third person of the Trinity, lives in us as his Temple because of our baptism (1 Cor. 6:19), when we were “sealed” by him and “marked as Christ’s own forever” (1979 BCP, p. 308). At our confirmation, the Spirit unleashes in us his sevenfold gifts, daily increasing these “manifold gifts of grace” (1928 BCP, p. 297). He renews our baptismal purity from sin every time we receive the sacrament of reconciliation (John 20:22). He nourishes us in the Holy Eucharist when he feeds us with Jesus’ body (Matt. 26:26). And from his lively activity within us, the Spirit also intercedes for us with “sighs too deep for words” every time we pray (Rom. 8:26).

Prayer is more than asking God for stuff. Petitioning God for what we and others need is an essential part of prayer, but there is much more to it. The traditional categories of confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and adoration provide a salutary itinerary: we begin with ourselves, our shortcomings and our needs, we continue with a recognition of God’s provision for us, and we end with pure awe at God’s majesty. All these modes of prayer (and much more besides) are evident in the Psalter, the nursery for all Christian prayer and the soil for Jesus’ prayer.

And yet these conventional categories still don’t say everything. St. Paul unfolds the reach of Christian

prayer to its fullest extent when he exhorts the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Monks throughout the ages have taken Paul at his word: from the Eastern hesychasts who unite to their breath the constant utterance of the Jesus Prayer; to desert ascetics who persistently send “arrow prayers” to pierce the veil of heaven; to the early monk who advised a young novice eager to learn the ways of prayer that, if he willed, he could “become all flame” (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*).

The psalmist prays, “One thing have I asked of the LORD, one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life; to behold the fair beauty of the LORD, and to seek him in his Temple” (Ps. 27:4). St. Augustine took this passage to be an illustration of what Paul meant by ceaseless prayer. The psalmist has a constant, unceasing, and ever intensifying desire to be swept up into the presence of God, to behold his beauty, to seek his face. That, Augustine says, is

ceaseless prayer: “When we cherish uninterrupted desire along with the exercise of faith and hope and charity, we ‘pray always’” (*Letter* 130).

But what about when we don’t feel this burning desire for God — when our hearts are dull and cold? The prayer of constant desire is as

